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Bishop Quintard's

Samson Sermon.

With an introductory note by  
Arthur H. Noll

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Bishop Quintard's  
Samson Sermon





BISHOP QUINTARD'S  
SAMSON SERMON

WITH AN

INTRODUCTORY NOTE  
BY ARTHUR HOWARD NOLL, LL.D.

Editor of "Bishop Quintard's Memoirs of the War";  
"Alexander Gregg, First Bishop of Texas," etc.



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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE



AS related in the fifteenth chapter of Bishop Quintard's *Memoirs of the War*,\* the Bishop enjoyed a reputation as a pulpit orator that became wider than national. He was a ready extemporaneous speaker, yet his sermons were for the most part carefully prepared, written out and delivered from manuscript. Some of them became widely known through many repetitions, and not a few became famous. One of these had a history the Bishop was as fond of telling as he was of repeating the sermon.

It became known as the Bishop's "Samson Sermon." It was first written in Nashville, Tennessee, September 2, 1858, and was preached in the Church of the Advent, of which Dr. Quintard was then rector, three days later. Upon the original draft, now before the present writer, there are annotations showing that it was preached in Columbia, Tennessee, November 4, 1858; in St. Peter's Church, Rome, Georgia, March 6, 1859, and in

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\* *Doctor Quintard, Chaplain C. S. A., and Second Bishop of Tennessee. Being His Story of the War (1861-1865), Edited and Extended by the Rev. Arthur Howard Noll. The University Press of Sewanee, Tennessee. Mcmv. Paper, 56 cents.*

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camp near Chattanooga, before the First Tennessee Regiment, August 10, 1862. By that time its fame had spread abroad, but the Reverend Doctor made no further note upon the sermon, when and where he preached it.

The Bishop was wont to relate that when first delivered outside of his parish (it must have been in St. Peter's Church, Columbia, in November, 1858), he was informed by a disgusted hearer that it was "positively indecent" and not fit to be preached before any congregation. Consequently it was "retired" until almost forgotten. Some months later, however, it was by accident included among sermons provided for use on one of Dr. Quintard's visits to another parish. This was no doubt St. Peter's Church, Rome, Georgia, in March, 1859; and when discovered with his homiletic ammunition, he read it over carefully without finding anything in it that could be characterized as indecent, and so he determined to try it again. It made a deep and wholesome impression upon the minds of those who then heard it, and from that time on it was its author's first choice among his sermons.

One Sunday night, after he became a Bishop, he preached it in Christ Church Cathedral, St.



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Louis, Missouri, and after the service a gentleman said to him, "Bishop, if you will repeat that sermon here to-morrow night, I will have the church full of men to hear you." The sermon was accordingly repeated, and the gentleman kept his promise.

The sermon was preached at Trinity College, Port Hope, Canada; at West Point, before a congregation of cadets; at Sewanee, Tennessee, before successive classes of students of the University of the South;—it was preached everywhere the Bishop went,—not infrequently at the request of someone who had heard it before and who wanted the impression made on his mind at the first hearing of it renewed.\*

It has been an oft-expressed desire on the part of many who have heard the sermon to have it published. The objection has been repeatedly raised, however, that it would be impossible to reproduce in print the personality of Bishop Quintard, without which the sermon would lose much of its power and effect. And the sermon as written is, after all, not quite the sermon that was preached and made such a deep impression upon its hearers. Many who now have the opportunity

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\* The present writer heard it in the House of Prayer, Newark, New Jersey, in 1879 or 1880.

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to read it will, for example, miss the lines which the Bishop introduced most impressively:—

“There is a time, I know not when,  
A place I know not where,  
That marks the destiny of men  
To glory or despair.”

But it is hoped that those who have heard the sermon will, as they now read it as it was first written, be able to recall the winning personality of the beloved Bishop, his impressive manner, and his voice “as musical as the lute and as resonant as a bugle.” Let it also be hoped that this message of Bishop Quintard, quite as much needed in the world to-day, will do good as of yore, in “turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.”

The manuscript presents evidences of alterations made at different times or to fit the sermon for some special occasion. As, for example, its use at the United States Military Academy, West Point, seemed to require a different peroration from that in the original. The text was also expanded, probably after the second or third preaching of the sermon. These alterations have been indicated in this edition by the use of brackets. A. H. N.

Sewanee, Tennessee,  
Advent, 1913.

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The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. [ . . . I will go out, as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him. ]—*Judges* xvi. 20.



THE story of Samson is a familiar one. He was a Nazarite unto God from the womb; that is, he was devoted, by express appointment, to the service of God. The word Nazarite signifies sanctified or consecrated; and so the phrase, “a Nazarite unto God from the womb,” signifies that he was sanctified or consecrated unto God from the time of his birth. His birth was foretold to his parents by an angel of the Lord, who when enquired of concerning his name, simply answered, “Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?” And then when Manoah and his wife offered a kid with a meat offering and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord, the angel did wondrously, “for it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar.”

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The child thus announced was in due time born into the world according to all the angel had foretold. His name was called Samson and he grew and the Lord blessed him. He grew more than ordinarily in strength and stature, and not in that only, but in other instances it appeared that the Lord blessed him, qualified him both in body and mind for something great and extraordinary. When he grew up a little, we are told that "the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol," that is, among the trained bands of the tribe of Dan, who probably had found a camp between Zorah and Eshtaol, near the place where he lived, to oppose the incursions of the Philistines. There Samson, when a child, appeared among them and signalized himself by some very brave actions, excelling them all in many exercises and trials of strength; and probably he showed himself more than ordinarily zealous against the enemies of his country and discovered more of a public spirit than could have been expected in one so young.

According to the promise of the angel, he did "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." When the Philistines made an incursion into the land of Judah, Samson executed

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signal vengeance upon them; and after that he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

And it came to pass afterwards that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek named Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her and said unto her, "Entice him and see wherein his great strength lieth and by what means we may prevail against him." He was lying in the arms of a harlot. Bribed by the Philistines, she undertook to discover the secret of his great strength.

"Tell me, Samson, is no power on earth too strong for you? Suppose a man wished to overcome you, what should he do?"

"It would be very easy," Samson replied. "If I were bound with new green withes, that were never dried, then shall I be weak and be as another man."

[The wicked woman sought to know no more.] She gets these withes from the Philistines; she contrives her plot, she forms her ambuscade; and having bound her wretched paramour, "They are at thee, Samson," she exclaims. "The Philistines be upon thee."

Samson gives a shake of his arm and "he brake the withes as a thread is broken when it toucheth the fire."



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Delilah feels ashamed at being thus mocked in the presence of her countrymen. "Ah, treacherous man," she said to him, "is it in this way that you mock me? How can I ever believe that you love me if you won't tell me your secrets;—if you hide your heart from me?"

Samson listens the second time and tells her that he must be bound with new ropes. Delilah binds him accordingly and repeats her former cry: "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson." He with a mere shift of his body extricates himself from the strong bandages, as if they were made of a spider's web.

The woman becomes more importunate, renews her attempts first by way of reproof and then of inquiry, and he in like manner answers again, telling her that he must be nailed to the floor of the room by the hairs of his head. Delilah nails him accordingly and cries aloud as before, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson." And he awakened out of his sleep and went away with the nail of the beam and with the web.

See to what straits this guilty female had brought this strong man, this judge of Israel. Three times she had handed him over to his enemies; three times she had brought him to the very

brink of destruction, and yet he still cleaves to her. Nay, he does worse; he becomes blinded and infatuated to such a degree as at length to reveal to her the true cause of his superhuman strength. She pressed him daily and urged him so that his soul was vexed; and then he told her all his heart and revealed to her the fact that the great strength with which he was endowed was in his hair. This was all she wanted. She recalls the Philistines. She lays her ambuscade afresh. She lulls her miserable paramour asleep on her lap. She has a razor brought and she makes a man shave off the seven locks of his head, and then she awakes him and casting him off from her arms throws him into those of his enemies, exclaiming, like one overjoyed, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson."

Samson awakes out of his sleep and thinking he could escape after the manner he had done before, he says with a feeling of inward complaisance, "I will go out, as at other times before, and shake myself." But it was no longer the time; for the Lord already "had departed from him."

Thereupon he was bound, blinded, dragged away as a prisoner, with nothing but his life left him. He had sacrificed his honor, conscience, interest, and every other valuable object to his unholy pas-

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sion; and now taken by the Philistines down to Gaza and bound with fetters of brass, this mighty judge of Israel is made to grind corn in the prison house. How are the glory and defence of Israel become a drudge and triumph of the Philistines! The crown is fallen from his head; woe unto him, for he hath sinned.

And now, beloved, you may search the Scriptures through from the beginning to the end, and you will scarcely find an example more calculated to illustrate the folly of those who go from sin to sin; the folly of all those who trust themselves to dally with sin and temptation. What was it that completed the ruin of unhappy Samson? Was it his love for the beautiful harlot? No, my hearers, not that, evil and sinful in the sight of God as it was; but it was that false presumption of his, which led him to brave future risks because he had fortunately escaped past ones. The seven green withes he had broken as a thread of tow when it toucheth the fire. The new ropes which never were occupied, he had broken from his arms as if they were threads. And when the seven locks of his head had been woven into a web and nailed to the floor he had drawn the nail from the floor as one would a twig from the sand. And having escaped all

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this, he said within himself, I will risk still more. He even ventured so far as to tell the very secret of his strength. His locks were shorn off and then the Lord, Who had been his strength when he smote the Philistines with a great slaughter; Who had given him strength to break the fetters, the withes and the cords of rope; then the Lord departed from him. But he knew it not and so he says, "I will go out, as at other times before, and shake myself." This was the fallacy that betrayed him.

And these are the fallacies that betray sinners throughout the world in their not perceiving that the day will come when the Lord will depart from them.

Behold that young man! Life stretches away in all the beauty of hope. Out, far out upon the great ocean of life he gazes. He may behold in the far distance those whose ships the tempest has shattered and dismantled; aye, he may see the shore strewn with the fragments of many a melancholy wreck; but, in nothing daunted, he spreads his canvas to the breeze and hopes soon to reach a haven of peace and happiness. But how early is that young adventurer doomed to meet with disappointment. Far off he sees a little cloud no

bigger than a man's hand; but as it rises it swells out and grows in blackness and burns with the lightning's flash, and the waters seethe and foam and the crested billows moan and the tempest howls about him, and his light vessel bounds before the storm and with torn sails rending before the blast, nothing but the wisdom which cometh from above can save him from the perils of the storm.

But, see him! A child he knelt beside his mother's knee and learned to say to that Great God, his Creator, "Our Father,"—my Father. His conscience has been cultivated. Right principles have been instilled into his mind; and the instructions of his pious parents follow him; the duties of regarding the holy Sabbath; of reading the Bible; and of morning and evening bowing the knee of devotion he finds it difficult to neglect. The great hesitation with which such a youth commits the first act of open transgression is an evidence of his tenderness of conscience. He feels when tempted to sin that the eye of an Omnipresent God is upon him and that he must one day render up his account at a just tribunal.

But by gentle degrees the tempter lures him on and clothes his vices in the garb of virtues. For some pressing duty he relinquishes the hour given



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to heaven and to God. For some excuse of relaxation he slights God's house and profanes God's day. His companions are those, the fashionable, the gay and the dissipated, who laugh at his scruples; and though startled at their oaths and shocked at their conversation, he pleads that it is the way of the world and he cannot reform it. These are crimes made venial by the occasion, he thinks. He pleads this, I say, but conscience reckons with him. He hears a voice—"The Philistines be upon thee!" He beholds himself bound with "seven green withes that were never dried." All about him he sees temptations and he resolves to overcome; and so he does. The withes are broken; his strength has not gone. He is free!

But once more the delights of social intercourse (it may be) woo him to temptation. He faintly resolves that he will shun the society of his destroyers as he would a loathsome pestilence. But alas, the arts and the wiles and the stratagems of Satan are laid too deep for him. He has once had him in his embrace. He has once been bound with green withes. His virtues have been once withered by the foul contagion that pervades the haunts of vice and he is entrapped again. He is flattered and carressed and led on until his soul is

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ripe for destruction, until he is bound with new ropes. And now as he hears the voice, "The Philistines be upon thee," he is startled at the length to which he has gone. He rises up and in the might and majesty of his strength he breaks asunder every cord and resolves never again to touch the wine cup in which he has seen the adder; never to touch cards nor even to look at the dice again; the very precincts of the gambling hell he will avoid; the lips of the strange woman which drop as an honeycomb, but whose feet go down to death, and whose steps take hold on hell,—with these he will hold no parley, but break loose from them all;—and the new ropes are broken.

But now when temptation assails him, once more he says, I have broken through the withes and the ropes. Twice have I conquered, nay thrice I have gone out and shaken myself, and my strength hath not failed me. And so he flatters himself and thinks that if he give way once more, all he has to do is to trust to the same strong arm and firm resolve to extricate himself. Soon the enemy renews his arts and Delilah presses him daily with her words and urges him so that his soul is vexed within him. The arts and the stratagems of the enemy are redoubled; and he sleeps

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upon the lap of the harlot and is shorn of his strength. And when he is roused by the cry, "The Philistines be upon thee," he rises up as before and says, "I will go out and shake myself and free myself from them." But alas, he cannot. His strength has departed and he is in the power of his enemy. His vices have triumphed. And now, a blind, bloated, and besotted and miserable prisoner he drags out a weary life in the prison of the Devil.

And now you may see him, this once strong man, yielding himself up heart and soul to the enemy. He has staked his peace of conscience, his happiness, his reputation; the hopes of friends, the approbation of God, the salvation of his undying soul; staked them, I say, and played with them and lost them. If the enemy has taken him by the wine cup, see him a poor, despised and besotted wretch, almost refused earth enough to cover his miserable carcass. If the enemy has entrapped him at the gaming table, look at his end. See the pallid countenance, the bloodshot eye, the agitated and almost convulsed frame. What regrets fill his soul as memory lugs the past up before the bar of conscience. With what stings is he pierced! See him in his frenzy make the last desperate throw of the dice,

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with the faint hope that he may not lose all. But he is ruined [Remorse drops anguish from her burning eyes], and in madness he rushes from the room; and then; and *then*, with one plunge finishes the work and he goes unprepared into the presence of his Maker. [And there we leave him.]

What a spectacle is this for angels to behold! What a life for the subject of a holy and redeeming God to be engaged in! What a perversion of immortal powers and Godlike faculties! We learn from all this the danger of one wrong step. Not because that single [step] is wrong, but because it leads to others. The man who is only beginning the practice of dishonesty would be shocked if his future character were unfolded to him. If he were told that a time would come when a regard to his own interest would outweigh all other considerations; when fraud and deception would lose their deformity in his eyes; and when he would stoop to the vilest arts in order to increase his substance; he would think himself injured by the insinuation. His present intention is to retain a large portion of his integrity; and he esteems himself incapable of actions to which his present measures are a natural introduction.

The same astonishment would seize the person

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who is in the first stage of sensuality, if his future excesses were revealed to him; the infamous vices of the libertine and drunkard; the crimes which mark the whoremonger and adulterer; the degrading passions and habits of those who glory in their shame, are objects of his detestation. In the sincerity of his heart he would protest against such actions. Still, how easy is the descent to ruin! Thoughtlessness of God has terminated in an avowed contempt of His character and His authority. From doubts in regard to religion arises unbelief. In the first stages of vice, bound with the green withes, men could not be unjust, malevolent or perfidious without doing some violence to their feelings; but shorn of their strength, they have become strangers to remorse. Occasional falsehoods have been succeeded by a confirmed disregard for truth. Occasional acts of dishonesty have led to every species of injustice. Intemperate at times, men have been reconciled to the lowest degradation of their nature. One deliberate departure from the laws of chastity has been followed by all the crimes that mark the libertine. Anger in the beginning has not been satisfied until the hand of revenge has driven a dagger to the heart; and a disrespectful manner of conversing



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on the subject of religion has gotten in the end to be habitual blasphemy and impiety.

Not all at once. At first Samson can throw off the withes that bind him and the new rope and the nail. But every lust gains strength by gratification. The longer men continue under the dominion of sin, the more pleasure do they find in the practice of it. And just as virtue displays new charms the more we practice it, so does vice not only lose its deformity, but is more and more relished and enjoyed by those who are addicted to it; the stronger become the ropes and the bandages, until the strength to resist is all gone and there is no hope nor chance to return.

[And now for each one of you, so especially for those of you who are about to receive the honors of this national school, what shall your life be? One thing or the other, virtue and honor and holiness and heaven, or vice and sin and wretchedness and despair. You must make your choice. It will not do to say "I will not choose." Choose you must. It is the essential condition of man's life,—this choice between vice and virtue, this struggle between the evil and the good. If you have a good courage to take your stand for God, you will come off more than conquerors. If you

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refuse to confess Christ, if you refuse God's service and indulge in low, base and sensual pleasures, reckless of God, reckless of Judgment, reckless of Eternity, you yourselves know what the end must be. There is a time in every man's life when he must fight and win, or yield up and be dispirited and lost. It is as with an army in a battle: there is almost always some point which is the key to the whole position, the loss of which decides the contest. It may be some eminence which the husbandman scarcely notices as he passes over it with his plough. It may be some "round tower" as at Murfreesboro. But around it the battle rages. There the veterans of a hundred fights are planted never to retreat. The artillery of an empire is pointed to sweep it with its iron hail; and squadron on squadron press on and are lost in the waving tempest of fire. The embattled ranks pause to witness how on that point goes the day. If the position is lost, from rank to rank, from squadron to squadron follow dismay and flight and disaster.

In the name of God I summon [call] you to conflict and victory. In all your manliness stand forth and enlist under Christ's banner. As men you will be all the truer; as soldiers all the better and

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the braver. I know not what may be before you. In the hour of your country's need you may mark out a lofty and heroic career. Amid the rush of battle, calm and controlled, you may win for yourselves honor among your fellows. With an heroic heart you may bind your life to duty, and when destruction rushes dreadful to the field and bathes itself in blood, you may bear your country's banner with a firm hand and an unflinching heart. And if your soul is stayed on God, come life or come death, your victory shall be sure.

But think what a worthless life that is, what a failure and a disappointment that life must be, which is lived without God. No fruit,—no fruit unto holiness, a wasted life, a worthless life, nothing but leaves for the harvest of eternity!]

O beloved, while you may, break the green withes, break the new ropes of sin, and return, lest the Philistines be upon thee and there be found no place nor room for repentance. There is every reason for an immediate attention to your eternal interests. You are exhorted, you are conjured to consider the things which belong to your peace before they are hidden from your eyes. The tender mercies of God, the dying love of our Redeemer, the precious promises and awful threaten-

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ings of the Gospel, the joys of heaven and the terrors of hell are all set before us as inducements to give our hearts to God and live as reasonable creatures. Would to God, beloved, it were possible for you to realize the value of the present moment! O that we could ascend to heaven and be witnesses of the exquisite felicity of the righteous! O that we could penetrate the blackness of darkness and be spectators of the shame and misery of the ungodly! O that we could trace things to their consequences and see how naturally our present conduct must determine our future condition! Could we contemplate our actions in all their connections, we should most assuredly make haste to turn from the service of Satan to the blessed Lord Who hath pledged His word—"They that seek me early shall find me;" "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."







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